United Nations S/2004/965

Security Council

Distr.: General
10 December 2004

Original: English

Twenty-fourth report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone

I. Introduction

1. By its resolution 1562 (2004) of 17 September 2004, the Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) until 30 June 2005. By the same resolution, the Council requested me to report regularly on progress made in peace consolidation in Sierra Leone. The present report is submitted pursuant to that request, and provides an assessment of the security situation and the overall progress made in the drawdown of the Mission since my last report, of 9 September 2004 (S/2004/724). It also describes the preparations for the transition from the current configuration of UNAMSIL to its residual presence in Sierra Leone, as set out in resolution 1537 (2004) of 30 March 2004.

II. Security situation

2. During the reporting period, the overall security situation in Sierra Leone has remained generally calm and stable. It was therefore possible for UNAMSIL, on 23 September 2004, to transfer to the Government of Sierra Leone primary responsibility for security in the Western Area, including Freetown, which was the last area under UNAMSIL control, thereby completing the overall transfer. Consequently, the Mission's tasks are being readjusted, in consultation with the Government, to a role of providing support to the national security services.

3. Since the commencement of trials by the Special Court on 3 June 2004, there have been no significant threats reported against the Court. As the Court's work continues, however, the security risk remains high for its staff, witnesses and facilities. In the meantime, on 8 November, some 45 detainees escaped from the non-court Pademba Road prison in Freetown. The Government indicated that none of the escapees were standing trial for treason, such as the "Westside Boys" or some former members of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). However, the escapes caused concern regarding the level of security at the city's major prison. Only 2 of 45 escapees have been rearrested so far, while a third gave himself up. The investigation of this incident is ongoing.

4. The relationship between the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces and the Sierra Leone police continued to improve, as the leadership of the two security

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agencies committed themselves to enhancing cooperation, as stressed in their joint communiqué of 9 August. In addition, joint operations undertaken recently by the two entities, particularly in the border areas, have helped to foster better tactical coordination between the security forces.

5. At the same time, the issue of the disputed area in Sierra Leone north of the border village of Yenga remains a cause for concern. At a meeting convened on 2 September, the President of Sierra Leone, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, and the President of Guinea, Lansana Conté, issued a statement reaffirming that the village of Yenga belonged to Sierra Leone. Nevertheless, the armed forces of Guinea have maintained a small presence in the area, and there have been reports of some Sierra Leonean civilians there being harassed by the troops. This issue continues to generate tensions and still has the potential to negatively affect the cordial relations existing between the two countries.

6. There have been no major external threats to the security of Sierra Leone during the period under review. The situation in Liberia has continued to stabilize, despite the recent disturbances in Monrovia. In addition, the security situation on the border with Liberia has improved with the deployment of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and also the deployment of immigration officials from the National Transitional Government of Liberia at major border crossings. Joint border patrols by the Sierra Leone police and armed forces have increased with the support of UNAMSIL.

7. Despite the stable security environment, the socio-economic situation in the country has continued to be very difficult, including rising youth unemployment and the spiralling prices of basic commodities, causing tensions among the population. The negative impact of the lack of improvement in the living conditions of the majority of the population on the prospects for national recovery remains an issue of serious concern.

III. Implementation of the drawdown plan and preparations for the transition to the residual Mission presence

8. The drawdown of UNAMSIL has remained on track and is being conducted in accordance with the adjusted timetable described in my report of 6 July 2004 (S/2004/536). By the end of December, the troop strength is expected to be reduced to some 4,000 personnel and 184 United Nations military observers. After the repatriation of a Nigerian battalion in December 2004, the UNAMSIL force will consist of three infantry battalions together with supporting troops. As part of the transition, Northern and Southern Command headquarters will close on 31 December 2004. All units will then be under the direct command of the Mission's headquarters.

9. In line with the drawdown plan, by the end of December 2004, the strength of the United Nations civilian police component, which now stands at 118 officers, will be reduced to 80 personnel consisting of 15 trainers, 35 mentors and 9 headquarters staff, including the Police Commissioner, 6 advisers on airport security, cross-border issues and diamond-mining policing. Fifteen specialized unit advisers located at the Sierra Leone police headquarters to address issues including community policing, gender-related violence, anti-narcotics strategies and cooperation with Interpol will

also remain. It is envisaged that United Nations civilian police trainers will remain at the Police Training School in Hastings and the three regional training centres in Bo, Makeni and Kenema. Some mentors will be located at the 10 team sites to continue field coaching.

10. While preparing for the Mission's withdrawal, UNAMSIL continues to refine its drawdown plan in consultation with the International Military Advisory and Training Team, in order to properly support the Government's security services. The national security exercise, which was held in November, with the aim of testing planning procedures following the disengagement of UNAMSIL, represented a significant achievement. The first phase, conducted from 1 to 5 November, involved an exercise in joint decision-making in crisis situations involving the National Security Council, with the participation of key Ministries and Government agencies. The second phase, organized from 17 to 21 November, focused on the operational preparedness of the Sierra Leone police and armed forces joint force command.

11. UNAMSIL has continued to monitor and mentor the district and provincial security committees, which improved their performance during the reporting period. However, their effectiveness continues to be hampered by the poor logistical infrastructure, acute shortage of vehicles and other logistical problems.

12. In the meantime, UNAMSIL and the United Nations country team have continued to coordinate closely to ensure a seamless transition from peacekeeping to peacebuilding in Sierra Leone. To that end, UNAMSIL and the country team are jointly developing a transition plan, which identifies priority tasks to be implemented during 2005. The plan focuses on national capacity-building, strengthening national ownership and ensuring the Government's lead in the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes in key areas. The plan also aims at ensuring the Government's focus on addressing the root causes of the conflict, which would require further far-reaching reforms in critical areas including the justice sector and the penal system.

A. Strengthening the capacity of the Sierra Leone police

13. Together with the Commonwealth team, UNAMSIL has continued to assist the Sierra Leone police in accelerating the pace of recruitment and enhancing the training of new cadets. Since 2,174 police recruits have been trained at the Police Training School in Hastings, the current strength of the Sierra Leone police has reached some 7,700 personnel, including over 1,000 women, who make up 14 per cent of the force. Following the graduation in mid-December of the current group of 417 recruits, the overall strength of the force will stand at 8,125 personnel.

14. The rehabilitation of the Police Training School in Hastings has been completed. However, the facilities still lack furniture and other basic equipment necessary for the envisaged increase to up to 600 police recruits in each training session. In the meantime, 520 candidates have been selected for the next training course, which is scheduled to commence in January 2005. Another round of recruitment will begin in December 2004. The construction of the three regional training centres in Bo, Makeni and Kenema has also been completed, although those centres also lack some most basic equipment. At the same time, construction of billets at Jendema, Makeni, Kamakwie, Tongo, Daru, Segbwema and Kailahun is

still in progress, which has caused delays in the deployment of police personnel to those areas.

15. With funding provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations civilian police component is now carrying out in-service training programmes at the regional training centres. A total of 298 police inspectors and sergeants have benefited from this training, while an additional 220 police officers have been trained in field coaching. They are expected to gradually assume the mentoring role currently provided by United Nations civilian police. In addition, 440 Sierra Leone police drivers have been trained. UNAMSIL also provides police officers with sensitization lectures on human rights and issues relating to gender-based violence. Furthermore, the Mission has assisted the Sierra Leone police in the recruitment and training of 20 immigration officers and has developed training and management manuals for immigration and corrections personnel.

B. Strengthening the capacity of the armed forces

16. The training and restructuring of the Sierra Leone Armed Forces has continued to make progress. In a most welcome development, 260 trucks were donated recently by the Government of Switzerland to the armed forces, which is a highly commendable gesture. That donation, together with the continuing generous assistance of the United Kingdom, should help considerably in resolving the chronic transport and communications problems affecting the armed forces. However, the forces' overall operational effectiveness remains problematic, among other things because of the shortage of tactical level communications and other equipment, as well as accommodation.

C. Consolidation of State authority

17. In collaboration with the World Bank and UNDP, the Government of Sierra Leone has carried out a training and capacity-building programme to enhance the effectiveness of the newly elected local authorities. A review of local tax rates by the local councils, in collaboration with chiefdom authorities, is under way. In the current economic situation, however, the prospects for significant public revenues to be generated for funding basic services remain poor.

D. Reintegration of ex-combatants

18. UNAMSIL has continued to work closely with UNMIL regarding the Sierra Leone ex-combatants who have been disarmed and demobilized in Liberia. Meanwhile, UNAMSIL, UNDP, the Government of Sierra Leone and other stakeholders are preparing for the effective reintegration of those ex-combatants, who will eventually be repatriated to Sierra Leone.

19. From 4 to 7 October, the Government held meetings with officials from the National Transitional Government of Liberia with the participation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), to discuss plans for the

repatriation of some 435 Liberian ex-combatants from Sierra Leone and their subsequent inclusion in reintegration programmes in Liberia. A draft memorandum of understanding was produced, which is currently being reviewed by the two Governments. The ex-combatants are currently undergoing skills-training programmes, funded by the European Union, in preparation for their repatriation to Liberia early in 2005.

E. Restoration of Government control over diamond mining

20. The Government has continued to make progress in expanding its control over diamond mining. By the end of October, revenues from official diamond exports had reached $120 million, compared to $71 million during the same period in 2003. This is largely attributed to the Government's consistent implementation of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme. A Kimberley Process peer review visit to Sierra Leone and Guinea is scheduled for early in 2005, to address regional initiatives to prevent the illicit trading and smuggling of diamonds.

21. UNAMSIL, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United Kingdom Department for International Development and other stakeholders have continued to assist the Government in the implementation of a new minerals policy through technical and capacity-building support. UNAMSIL and UNDP recently organized a training programme for Sierra Leonean experts in geological information systems and data collection to complement the ongoing efforts by the Government to establish a national cadastral system.

IV. Human rights, national reconciliation and justice

A. Monitoring and promotion of human rights

22. The human rights situation in Sierra Leone has continued to improve during the reporting period. In collaboration with local human rights organizations, UNAMSIL has continued to monitor the Sierra Leone police operations and prisons, as well as the performance of the courts. The Law Reform Commission, which was reactivated in 2003 to review existing laws and make recommendations for their repeal or amendment, or the enactment of new laws, has produced a draft bill on sexual offences, which enhances the legislative conformity with international standards. The Government is currently considering the draft bill and is expected to submit it to Parliament soon. The Commission is also drafting a bill on inheritance and succession to eliminate the discriminatory provisions contained in existing legislation.

23. Long-term reform of the judicial system remains a necessity as the significant backlog of cases and prolonged detentions are still of concern. UNAMSIL and the United Nations country team continue to support the Government in its efforts to increase the number of magistrates and ensure the effectiveness of the Justices of the Peace deployed throughout the country.

B. Protection of children

24. UNAMSIL, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and child protection non-governmental organizations in Sierra Leone have continued to work with their counterparts in Liberia to ensure that the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration programme adequately addresses the issue of Sierra Leonean children associated with the Liberian fighting forces. ICRC has reunited an initial group of 12 such Sierra Leonean children with their families. It has identified a further group of 150 children in Liberia and is taking steps to facilitate the reunification of the families. Thirty-six Liberian children associated with the fighting forces in Sierra Leone still remain in refugee camps in the country, while some 168 have already been repatriated. Family reunification, repatriation and reintegration activities are being arranged by UNHCR and ICRC, in coordination with UNICEF in Liberia.

25. In a joint effort to address the problem of child trafficking, UNAMSIL, UNICEF and the Sierra Leone police rescued a group of 47 children from Masanga village, Tonkolili district, in the Northern Province of Sierra Leone, who were to be trafficked outside the country. All the children, except one who died of malnutrition, have been reunited with their families. A draft bill on child trafficking is currently being considered by Parliament.

26. Meanwhile, UNICEF has prepared a draft bill on children's policy and child rights and submitted it to the Government. UNICEF, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs and UNAMSIL are collaborating with the National Commission for War-Affected Children on the organization of public consultative conferences on the draft bill and children's policy in the provinces. UNAMSIL and UNICEF have also continued to support the National Commission in the development of a concept for its trauma healing centres, which is nearing completion.

C. Gender issues

27. In collaboration with the United Nations country team and other partners, UNAMSIL has continued to promote women's rights in Sierra Leone through training and awareness-raising programmes. In the meantime, principles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which Sierra Leone ratified in 1988, are being incorporated into the country's draft laws.

D. Truth and Reconciliation Commission

28. The final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was presented to President Kabbah on 5 October, and subsequently released to the public. In a joint effort by UNAMSIL and UNICEF, a child-friendly version of the report was prepared, which the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has recommended should be incorporated into the national school curriculum.

E. Special Court for Sierra Leone

29. The Special Court for Sierra Leone has continued the trials of the RUF and Civil Defence Force leaders. Since the trials began in June, 18 witnesses have testified in the RUF trial. Meanwhile, the trial of the Civil Defence Force leaders resumed on 2 November. It is expected that a second Trial Chamber, which will undertake the trial of the three leading members of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council currently detained by the Special Court, will begin its work early in 2005.

30. On 15 October 2004, the Special Court signed its first agreement on the enforcement of sentences, which will allow some of those convicted to serve their sentences outside Sierra Leone. The Special Court has also concluded a limited number of witness relocation agreements. It is, however, of special concern to the Court that there is as yet no agreement that would enable detainees to be temporarily transferred outside Sierra Leone for medical treatment. Meanwhile, the Special Court has finalized its work completion strategy.

V. Humanitarian issues and national recovery

31. Since the Sierra Leone voluntary repatriation operation began in September 2000, 271,777 Sierra Leonean refugees have been repatriated, 179,283 provided with assistance by UNHCR and the remainder benefiting from community-based reintegration assistance. Although UNHCR officially completed the repatriation operation in June 2004, a group of 353 Sierra Leonean refugees, currently in the Gambia, will exceptionally be assisted to repatriate before the end of the year.

32. The repatriation of Liberian refugees from Sierra Leone commenced on 1 October, since when 950 refugees have returned home. Some 66,000 Liberian refugees are currently in Sierra Leone, mostly living in camps in the southern and eastern parts of the country. UNHCR expects to repatriate up to 1,600 Liberian refugees by the end of this year, while the repatriation exercise is expected to be completed in 2006. Refugee family members are increasingly conducting informal visits to Liberia to prepare homes and farms pending their formal repatriation. This development indicates a growing confidence in the peace process in that country. At the same time, the United Nations transitional support teams are helping the Government to assist vulnerable communities in Sierra Leone. With the establishment of district councils, these teams are facilitating the adjustment of development assistance coordination mechanisms in the districts.

33. On the economic front, real GDP is projected to increase by 7.2 per cent in 2004. Meanwhile, the continuing depreciation of Sierra Leone's currency, the leone, coupled with the rapid expansion in money supply and the resulting impact on domestic prices, poses a challenge to macroeconomic stability in the country. Inflation and current exchange rates will require particular attention during 2005. The leone exchange rate has been under pressure because of rising oil prices, as well as increases in the prices of rice and other basic commodities. Sustaining a high rate of real growth in GDP is likely to become more challenging, as post-conflict aid is scaled down by the donor community. The expected decline in donor aid in 2005 emphasizes the need for strengthened domestic revenue collection and more stringent expenditure control measures.

VI. Regional aspects

34. The leaders of the Mano River Union countries, namely Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, have continued to exchange visits and maintain dialogue during the reporting period. President Kabbah's efforts to resolve problems within the leadership of the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) faction in Liberia are highly commendable.

35. Meanwhile, efforts are under way to restructure and strengthen the Secretariat of the Mano River Union to enable it to take on new responsibilities in the area of peace and security. On 5 November, the Ministerial Council of the Mano River Union met in Freetown and endorsed a new operational structure for the Secretariat, which would expand the scope of its mandate to coordinate the activities of civil society organizations working to promote peace and reconciliation in the subregion.

36. UNAMSIL, UNMIL and the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) have continued their efforts to enhance inter-mission cooperation. Among other steps, staff from the three missions have established contacts and exchanged visits to review developments, discuss ongoing threats, formulate policies, and develop modalities to tackle cross-border issues. From 5 to 8 October, UNOCI hosted a meeting of the Force Commanders of the three missions, which reviewed the general situation in the subregion, as well as specific conditions prevailing in the countries where the respective missions are deployed. Furthermore, the heads of peacekeeping and political missions in West Africa, at a meeting held in Monrovia on 3 December, stressed the need for a smooth and realistic exit strategy for the United Nations in Sierra Leone and welcomed the transitional plan referred to in paragraph 12 above as a model of transition from peacekeeping to peacebuilding. The heads of the missions also reaffirmed their commitment to inter-mission cooperation, including in the areas of cross-border activities and humanitarian assistance.

37. In addition, UNAMSIL is cooperating with UNMIL and UNOCI, and the United Nations Office for West Africa on the development of coherent strategies to address cross-border issues concerning disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, the flow of small arms and light weapons and the problem of child trafficking.

38. UNAMSIL and UNMIL have also commenced the operation of regular flights between Freetown, Monrovia and Accra. The two missions share flight hours, seat allocations and cargo space. The missions have also continued to work closely on other aspects of inter-mission cooperation.

VII. Mission support issues

39. From July to October 2004, UNAMSIL moved 5,553 troops out of and into the Mission area by air, as part of rotations and repatriations, and transported some 800 tons of air cargo on the flights. Furthermore, 76 sea containers and 259 vehicles of contingent-owned equipment were repatriated to troop-contributing countries.

40. As the Mission draws down, it continues to experience international staff turnover, owing to reassignments to new and expanding missions. As noted by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, the current global

demand for experienced staff in peacekeeping operations, coupled with the downsizing of UNAMSIL, has precipitated a reduction of such staff from the Mission. To ensure that adequate numbers of experienced staff are available to meet the operational demands of activities relating to downsizing, asset disposal, handover of programmes and lessons learned efforts, UNAMSIL, in cooperation with United Nations Headquarters, is working to try to retain or replace staff for mission-critical vacancies. At the same time, given the envisaged termination of the Mission's residual presence in Sierra Leone in 2005, efforts are under way to ensure the timely and orderly redeployment of experienced staff to other missions.

41. The investigation into the helicopter crash of 29 June 2004 is ongoing. On 18 November, UNAMSIL provided further documentation and material evidence for the investigation and analysis to the Interstate Aviation Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

42. In response to the recent outbreak of Lassa fever in Sierra Leone, which also affects United Nations operations, the Secretariat dispatched an expert team to Sierra Leone. It was determined that existing local facilities to manage the condition are limited and that UNAMSIL could play a role, jointly with the World Health Organization and the Mano River Lassa fever network, in building a local capacity to diagnose and treat the condition.

VIII. Observations and recommendations

43. The situation has remained generally calm and stable in Sierra Leone over the reporting period. The favourable security environment has facilitated further progress in the consolidation of peace in the country and has also enabled UNAMSIL to proceed with the continued drawdown of its military component. Furthermore, it has been possible for the Mission to transfer the overall primacy for security responsibility in the country to the Government of Sierra Leone.

44. Nonetheless, the lack of infrastructure and adequate equipment continues to hamper the operational effectiveness of the national security sector, most particularly in the border areas. Recent donor support, in particular the pledge of the Government of Switzerland to donate 260 assorted trucks to the Sierra Leone Armed Forces, as well as the continuing major support by the United Kingdom, has been most helpful. However, much more remains to be done towards strengthening the operational capacity of the police and armed forces. In view of this, the Government and its international partners should intensify efforts aimed at addressing the infrastructure and logistical needs of the Sierra Leone security sector.

45. In the meantime, UNAMSIL will continue its progressive drawdown and the envisaged transition to its residual presence to be completed by the end of February 2005. UNAMSIL will monitor closely the security situation and provide the necessary support to the Government. I also intend to submit to the Security Council, in April 2005, a report on the implementation of the benchmarks it had established for the residual UNAMSIL presence, together with a further assessment of the security situation in the country and possible recommendations in this regard.

46. The Government of Sierra Leone has made commendable efforts to enhance the control of diamond mining, which has resulted in a considerable increase in revenues from official diamond exports. This achievement constitutes one of the key

outcomes of the consolidation of State authority across the country. The authorities should be encouraged to continue further strengthening their control over this sector, which is essential for the revitalization of the national economy.

47. In the justice sector, the Government of Sierra Leone has taken additional steps to enhance the rule of law, in particular through the recent appointment of a number of High Court judges, which would help to expedite adjudication of the large backlog of cases pending before the courts. Much remains to be done, however, to address the long-standing structural challenges facing the justice sector in the country. This requires a comprehensive approach and far-reaching reforms, including a major reform of the corrections system, which should be carried out as a matter of urgency.

48. As Sierra Leone moves from recovery and reconstruction to the development phase, concerted and highly focused actions by the Government and its international partners will need to be taken to address the alleviation of poverty to ensure that improvements in the macroeconomic situation have a positive impact on living standards of the population. The poverty reduction strategy paper, which is currently being finalized by the Government in consultation with its developmental partners, would provide the framework for this course of action. Post-conflict aid will need to be followed by adequate longer-term donor assistance and development.

49. The ongoing efforts to stabilize Liberia will no doubt positively affect the situation in the whole Mano River Union subregion, and in Sierra Leone in particular. The recent disturbances in Côte d'Ivoire have created a ripple effect in the region, however, especially with regard to the influx of Ivorian refugees on the already overstretched facilities in the neighbouring countries. It is obvious that, if the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire persists, the stability of the whole subregion, including Sierra Leone, could be seriously jeopardized.

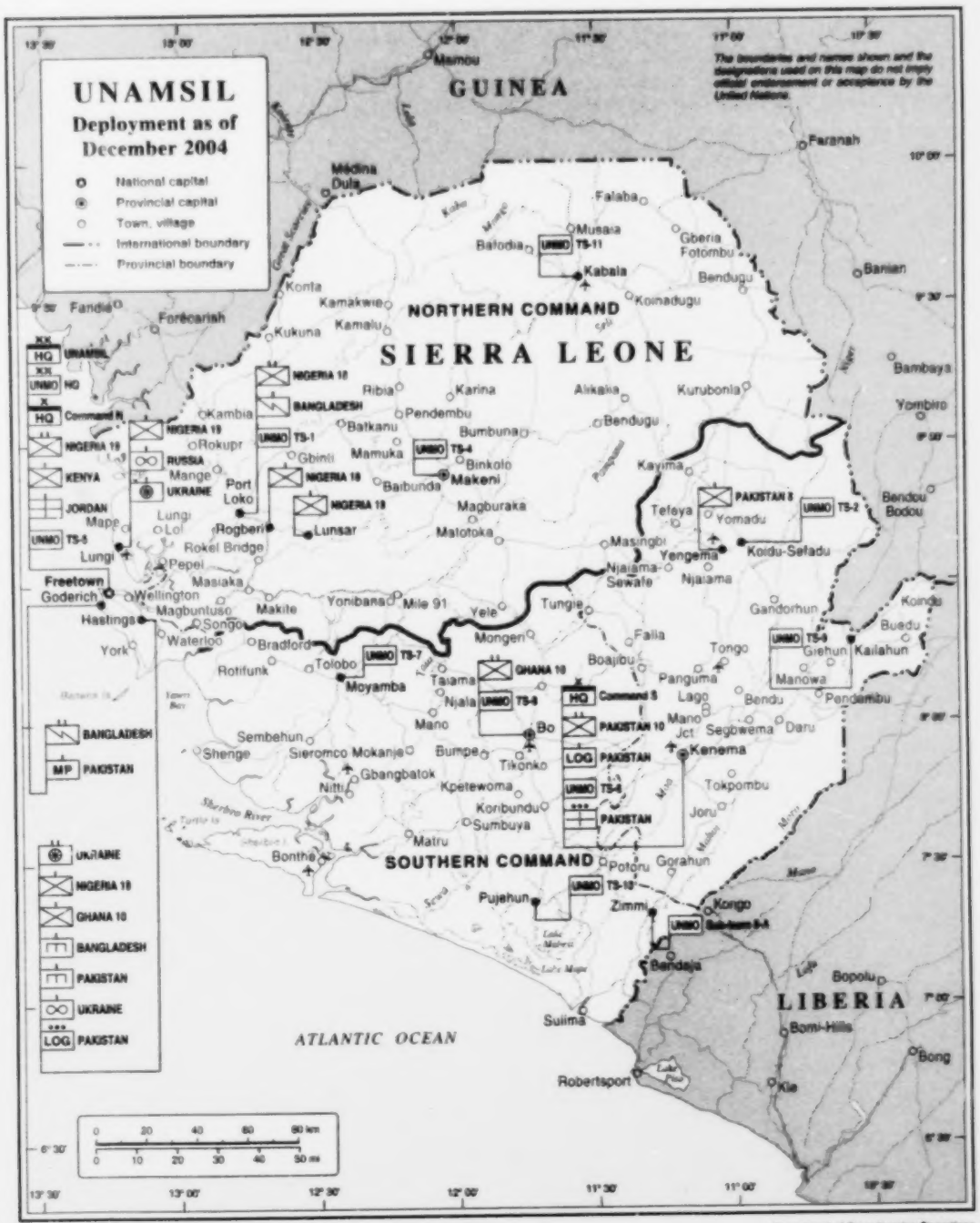
50. In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to the countries contributing troops and police for UNAMSIL, as well as to the Economic Community of West African States, donors, and the humanitarian and developmental community for their unwavering support to the peace consolidation process in Sierra Leone. I also commend my Special Representative, Daudi Ngelautwa Mwakawago, and all UNAMSIL military and civilian personnel for their contribution to the efforts to restore lasting peace in Sierra Leone.

Annex

United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone: military and civilian police strength (as at 5 December 2004)

	Military				*Police*
Countries	*Military*	*Staff officers*	*Troops*	*Military component total*	*Civilian police component total*
Bangladesh	8	17	456	481	2
Bolivia	3			3	
Canada	5			5	3
China	3			3	
Croatia	6			6	
Czech Republic	2			2	
Denmark	1			1	
Egypt	9			9	
Gambia	15			15	4
Germany			16	16	
Ghana	5	9	775	789	10
Guinea	5	1		6	
India					6
Indonesia	6			6	
Jordan	6	4	121	131	2
Kenya	6	10	188	204	6
Kyrgyzstan	2			2	
Malawi					4
Malaysia	5			5	4
Mali	7			7	
Mauritius					2
Namibia					4
Nepal	5	3		8	4
New Zealand	2			2	
Nigeria	7	12	1 581	1 600	8
Norway					2
Pakistan	11	15	1 287	1 313	2
Russian Federation	7	4	110	121	2
Senegal					6
Slovakia	1			1	
Sri Lanka					6
Sweden	1			1	4
Thailand	3			3	
Turkey					7

	Military				*Police*
Countries	*Military*	*Staff officers*	*Troops*	*Military component total*	*Civilian police component total*
United Kingdom	12	6		18	10
Ukraine	2	3	617	622	
United Republic of Tanzania	12			12	
Uruguay	6			6	
Zambia	7	5		12	14
Zimbabwe					6
Totals	**170**	**89**	**5 151**	**5 410**	**118**



Map No. 4132 Rev. 28 UNITED NATIONS
December 2004

Department of Peacekeeping Operations
Cartographic Section